GSA Advantage!

GSA *Advantage!,* an on-line shopping service, is an electronic ordering system designed to put the world of products and services offered through GSA at just a "point and click" away. The goal of the system is to bring together all GSA products, along with their descriptions, current prices, and delivery options to provide a simplified method of ordering. The system will offer all products supplied through:

. FSS Stock and Special Order Programs

' FSS Customer Supply Centers

. Federal Supply Schedule Programs

GSA *Advantage!* allows users to quickly browse, perform keyword searches on product specific information, review delivery options, and assemble and place an order. If preferred, users may "park" their electronic shopping carts and finish the order at a later time. Also, the system will enable you to download information to your own system or use GSA *Advantage!* to create your own Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) schedule orders. GSA *Advantage! is* being developed incrementally. During the summer of 1995 several customers participated in the alpha test by ordering wholesale products through Internet access. Their feedback on system design and functionality was critical for opening up ordering to all. In October 1995, GSA Schedules 70-I-B/C and 58-V-A were brought into the system. Retail and Special Order items will be introduced in the first quarter of fiscal year 1997, and the remaining schedules will be phased in during the next two years, with all schedules available in September 1997.

Once the ordering function is open, authorized users will be able to place orders through GSA Advantage! An authorized user is one who has a GSA-assigned account number (Activity Address Code) and password, OR is the holder of the Government Purchase Card (IMPAC card). Browsing will always be open to anyone.

For more information on the Government Purchase Card, call (703) 305-6658 or write: GSA/FSS (FCX), Washington, D.C. 20406. If you wish to apply now for a GSA account, call (703) 305-7997, or write: GSA/FSS (FCSI), Washington, D.C. 20406.

Authorization is necessary to place an order, BUT all are welcome to browse the system. Customers can currently browse GSA Advantage! through the Internet's World Wide Web by using an Internet browser such as Mosaic, Netscape, etc. HTTP://www.gsa.gov is the Internet address.

Customers with access to the Internet, FTS2000 Network, or the Defense Digital Network can dial in, browse, and search for specific product information. Although customers without World Wide Web access won't be able to participate immediately, in the months ahead, there will be access to GSA Advantage! through multiple 1-800 dial-up options including: PPP access, VT access, and if preferred, direct access to a GSA representative who will place the order for you.

What does GSA *Advantage!* have to do with FACNET?

When *GSA ADVANTAGE!* does not have the item needed, use of the Federal Acquisition Network (FACNET) will be the best avenue for procuring items. Like *Advantage!*, FACNET also uses electronic technology to speed up the acquisition process. However, under the FACNET system customers must comply with procurement rules for item descriptions, vendor screening bid valuation, and other regulatory details to acquire supplies and services. Items provided under GSA schedule contracts will be updated by vendors directly using EDI. GSA *Advantage!* does not replace FACNET . . . but it makes it easier to use.

Advantage! to Customers

. Customers may no longer need to maintain paper copies of supply schedules and vendor catalogs

. Instant electronic access to thousands and eventually millions of commercial brand name items
. GSA can provide agencies with ordering and billing history data
. Real time pricing
. Improved access to Javits-Wagner-O'Day products
. Agencies can access system at various agency levels
. Reduced time required to find needed products
. Knowledge of GSA internal buying practices no longer needed
. Faster order placement
. Improved delivery time through use of EDI
. All GSA products available on one system

If you have more questions, call the voice mail hotline: (703) 305-7359 or write GSA/FSS, Acquisition Operations & Electronic Commerce Center, Washington, D.C. 20406. The Internet E-mail address is:
GSA.Advantage@gsa.gov

What Items Are Available on GSA *Advantage?*
     At this time, only GSA wholesale stock items (items contracted for and warehoused by GSA) can be ordered through GSA *Advantage*. Items listed in the GSA Supply Catalog (Spring 1995) as "direct delivery" or "buy-on-demand" are not yet available for ordering.
     Items covered by Federal Supply Schedules 58-V-A, 70-I-B/C, and 56-IV-A, will be on-line and available Spring 1996. Items supported via GSA's Special Order and Retail programs will also become available during FY 96.
     The remaining 120 Federal Supply Schedules will become available beginning Spring 1996 with completion projected by the end of FY 97.

General Questions

~ **What is GSA *Advantage*?** GSA *Advantage* is an on-line ordering system that allows agencies to search through all GSA sources of supply and select the item that is the best value for their requirements, without having to know any complex paperwork or logistics system.

~ **What do I need to get on *Advantage* (hardware, software, etc.)?** In order to have full capability to view graphics, you need Internet access and a minimum 386 PC or equivalent processor with a browser such as Netscape Navigator. For security reasons, the Netscape browser is required for ordering via credit card. If you do not have Internet access, there will be dial-up capability, which would require a PC or equivalent and modem. No graphic displays can be provided this way, however.

~ **Can I get a copy of the video, pamphlet, etc.?** The video and pamphlet were sent to all schedule contractors during December 1995. Agencies may request a copy at *GSA.Advantage@gsa.gov* or through the hotline at 703-305-7359.

~ **How does this relate to FACNET?** GSA *Advantage* uses the FACNET architecture to receive contractor data and to send delivery orders. FACNET is still used by agencies who need to make open market purchases for items not covered by GSA sources.

~ **What security is there?** By requiring the browser Netscape for ordering using the IMPAC card, the highest level of security allowed (RSA 40) is utilized. The Netscape server will detect your browser and go into encryption mode automatically. For Agencies, Netscape is found under Schedule 70 B/C, from BTG Inc.

~ **I heard Netscape had a security breach?** Yes, some hackers did find a way to identify the base used for the encryption, but they were not able to actually break into the encryption itself. It is being recertified, and the marketplace will continue to be watched for other security improvements.

~ **If I have E-mail, do I have Internet access?** Not necessarily. There are many forms of E-mail and you do not have to have access to the Internet to have E-mail. Most E-mail systems offer the ability to send messages through the Internet, but to do so you must have access. Also, you may have access to Internet for E-mail purposes but still not be able to access the World Wide Web. Contact your computer support staff to determine your specific capabilities.

~ **Where can I learn more about EDI?** There are several outreach efforts underway within the government. SBA offices have a lot of information, particularly through SBA On-Line. SBA On-Line has fact sheets, glossaries, calendars of seminars and other information. DOD uses Electronic Commerce Resource Centers (ECRC) to provide EDI training and outreach. The Data Interchange Standards Association (DISA Inc.) has information about the standards, as well as local users groups. DISA Inc. can also be reached at (703)548-7005.

~ **When does schedule_____ get on line?** There is a plan which places every one of the 120 or so schedules on-line by 9/30/97 on a phased-in basis. Check NEWS on GSA *Advantage* for current plans.

~ **Are VA and DLA included?** Both of these agencies are pursuing

electronic catalogs, but they will not be part of *Advantage*. GSA is working with them to ensure that there are consistency and similarity where it makes sense. With the Internet, however, it is simple to "click" from one catalog to another.

~ **How is this different from accessing existing web pages?** GSA *Advantage* offers agencies the ability to comparison shop, by displaying all who have a particular item. It also offers the ability to order from any GSA program - wholesale, special order, schedule and retail, seamlessly.

~ **Can agencies get reports?** Yes, reports will be available on demand, and eventually may be an option in Advantage itself.

~ **What about FPDS data?** Whoever issues the order must report the procurement to FPDS. If you order with your GSA Account, GSA will report. If you order with your IMPAC or create your own order in *Advantage*, you will have to report it.

~ **Will I get FACNET "credit" for an order through *Advantage*?** While OFPP will be monitoring usage, the FAR specifically exclude delivery orders from the percentage of FACNET orders required for both "Interim" and "Full" FACNET certification. This would be the case if you issue them yourself or through *Advantage*.

~ **What if I already have EDI and an automated system for procurement or finance?** You will be able to search the items and after locating the product that provides the best value, download an ASCII file into your own system. You could also order through *Advantage* and use the download process to provide data to your finance system.

~ **When I find an item do I have to order right then? Can I save?** You can "park" your shopping cart. You will receive a number to allow you (or someone authorized to order) to retrieve it in a later session.

~ **What if I order the same group of items regularly?** You can go into order history and pull up an old order, adjust the quantities if required, and resubmit. Being considered is the development of a "hot list" option on *Advantage*.

~ **How do I change an order?** At the present time, changes must be made off-line. However, changes are expected to be minimal, since prices and other terms are built into the system, reducing errors. Cancellation of unshipped orders will be allowed

~ **What does it cost to order from GSA *Advantage*?** There is no extra charge to an agency to order through GSA *Advantage*.

~ **How do I get Internet access?** First, check with your local computer systems people to find out what you already have access to. You may find you already have access and just didn't know it. If you have no access, then you must contact a Service Provider. You have two types of Service Providers, one offering Local Service and one offering National Service. You will normally find a listing of these in any current publication covering the subject "Internet". Check your local book store or library. Service Providers will offer three levels of access to the Internet. Level 1 and 2 will be dial-up modems. Level 1 is for a single individual site, such as your personal access at home. Level 2 is for a local LAN where a number of people need

access. Both levels 1 and 2 may be obtained at a nominal charge. Level 3 is for a national hook-up where hundreds or more people need access. This is accomplished by the Service Provider facilitating "hard wired" access through the utility companies. This is the most costly initially, but gives you the most direct access and is the most economic overall where a large number of people need access. GSA is currently investigating a method of providing easy Internet access to agencies.

~ **When will *Advantage* be available to all agencies?** *Advantage* is currently available to all government agencies having Internet access. You may apply for an *Advantage* password and GSA Activity Address Code (AAC) account at the GSA *Advantage!* Sign On, or you may call (703) 305-7977.

~ **When will the Customer Supply Center items be available?** CSC items are currently scheduled for implementation in the first quarter of 1997.

~ **How will agencies know what's new in *Advantage*? Is any special training required?** Your best bet is to keep browsing *Advantage;* you will see notices of changes, additions and improvements. You also may want to check under "News". GSA is striving to make the system self-explanatory, but on-line help and a basic manual will be available.